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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 000109

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/19/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL UN UNMIK YI EZ EUN

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: CZECHS WILL RECOGNIZE AFTER EU MAJORITY

REF: A. STATE 16319

¶B. PRAGUE 103

¶C. PRAGUE 92

Classified By: POLEC Counselor Michael Dodman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) The Czech Republic has said they will recognize Kosovo, but not immediately. Following the meeting of EU Foreign Ministers on February 18, Czech Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg, announced that "we will acknowledge Kosovo, as soon as a majority of other European countries do and as soon as it is evident that Kosovo authorities are able to assume their responsibility and protect minorities and their monuments." While Czech Prime Minister Topolanek has indicated publicly that the GOCR requires time before it is able to recognize Kosovo, Deputy Prime Minister Vondra has been even more specific and has publicly stated that "it is not a matter of a day. It is rather a matter of weeks."

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Behind the Scenes - Preparations to Recognize Kosovo  
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¶2. (C) Although the Czechs are publicly indicating that they need time, they are privately making the necessary preparations to recognize Kosovo. Czech MFA Deputy Director of South Eastern and Eastern Europe, Pavel Svitil, indicated to Polec Counselor on February 19 that his office is now working on the paperwork to recognize and establish diplomatic relations. This decision requires approval of the full government. The government will not meet this week, but will have a session on February 25. Neither Svitil nor contacts in the Prime Minister's office expect the recognition issue to be taken up at that session.

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Czech Domestic Politics - GOCR Working to Overcome Some Opposition  
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¶3. (SBU) President Klaus, who was re-elected on Friday, February 15 after a divisive political struggle, has yet again complicated matters for the coalition government by indicating that Kosovo's independence can have "unprecedented consequences" for Europe. The opposition, which does not hesitate to criticize the GOCR whenever the opportunity arises, has indicated that it considers the declaration of independence premature and that the declaration may even decrease security in Europe.

¶4. (C) Comment: The question regarding how "soon" the GOCR will recognize Kosovo, will be determined in part by domestic politics. While the Czechs are preparing to recognize Kosovo, the Topolanek government, weakened by the bruising presidential election, appears not to be ready to rush into an issue that has already aroused domestic opposition. Thus, the most likely time for Topolanek to turn his attention to domestic issues and get his cabinet in order on Kosovo recognition is the first week of March.  
Thompson-Jones